

REPORT

GENEVA DRUG POLICY WEEK

When local and international actors meet in Geneva

The Geneva Drug Policy, the first of its kind, took place between the 24th and 28th of June 2019. The Week was organised by the Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances, supported by the Groupement Romand d'Etudes des Addictions (GREa) and the Institute of Global Health of the University of Geneva.

The main objective of the Week was to bring together relevant local and international actors working in the field of drug policy: permanent missions to the United Nations, United Nations agencies, academia, networks of people who use drugs, civil society and people from the field in Geneva, in order to talk about current local and international drug policies and share their experiences and work. In doing so, the *Geneva Drug Policy Week* contributed to consolidating Geneva's position as a key player in the international drug policy world.

In total, fifteen events, in the form of conferences, debates, round tables, film screenings, site visits and cultural events, were offered, free of charge to the general public in places across Geneva, such as the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; the University of Geneva (UniMail and Campus Biotech), Quai 9 and the CAAP Arve. The topics that were covered included health, conflicts, human rights, access to medicines, and others.

The University of Geneva Summer School entitled "Drugs, Health and Human Rights" constituted the "academic" part of the Week and was organised by the Institute of Global Health and partners.

The Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances would like to thank the Swiss Confederation and the Republic and Canton of Geneva for their support to the Geneva Platform and this Week in particular. It would also like to thank all the organisations and actors that participated in the Week and made its content so substantive.

The present report consists of the following elements :

- The list of organisations and actors that participated in the Geneva Drug Policy Week;
- A summary of what the Summer School "Drugs, Health and Human Rights", covered;
- The key points that were raised during the various events of the Week.

It is best read together with the detailed program which is available [here](#):

List of local and international actors that participated in the Geneva Drug Policy Week

- AIDS Foundation East West (AFEW)
- Argos
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
- Candle Charitable Foundation
- Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
- Coordination Committee of the Program to Expand Access of Vulnerable Groups of the Population to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment, and Care Services in the Russian Federation
- Dianova International
- Doctors without Borders
- Dristi Nepal
- Geneva Cantonal Police
- Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances
- Geneva University Hospitals
- Global Commission on Drug Policy (GCDP)
- Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
- Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
- Harm Reduction International (HRI)
- International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (IAHPC)
- International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy
- International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
- International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
- International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations (INNCO)
- International Network of People Who Use Drugs (INPUD)
- Intuitive Pictures
- Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS)
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR)
- Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations Office and to the Other International Organisations in Geneva
- Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the Other International Organisations in Geneva
- Première Ligne
- Radio Télévision Suisse romande (RTS)
- Small Arms Survey
- State Council of the Republic and Canton of Geneva
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- University of Geneva (UNIGE)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

Summer school « Drugs, health and human rights »

A Summer School, entitled “Drugs, Health and Human Rights” was organised by the Institute of Global Health of the University of Geneva together with several partners. 14 students from countries as diverse as Australia, Kenya, Switzerland, Rwanda, Italy and Sweden came to take part in the classes, learn about the inter-relationship between health, drugs and drug use, as well as the need for health and human rights to be at the centre of drug policies. The students also attended all of the public events that were part of the Geneva Drug Policy Week and were able to discuss with professionals working in the various drug-related fields.

The objectives of the Summer School were to:

- Become familiar with and gain insight into the functioning of international drug control regime and its intersection with public health and human rights ;
- Acquire a strong understanding of the major health issues related to drug use and drug policy;
- Develop a clear vision of why drug policy is debated today and what the challenges related to its implementation around the world are.

The Course was based on the University of Geneva’s recently launched MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) “Drugs, drug use, drug policy and health”, which represents the first of its kind in the relatively new field of the world of MOOCs; and students all registered for the MOOC as part of their participation in the Summer School. During this Summer School week, students were introduced to questions such as: what is a drug and why do people use them? when is drug use problematic? epidemiological aspects of drug use around the world; the key bases of the international drug control framework and how they have been interpreted; the consequences of prohibition; the history of Switzerland’s drug policy and harm reduction. During the Week, the students were also lucky enough to hear from guest lecturers (on Tuesday the 25th of June and Thursday the 27th of June) who respectively covered human rights related to drug policy; and the history, politics and negative impacts of drug policy from a more international relations-based perspective. The students were divided into groups to work together during the week and present a final oral presentation on the last day of class. The topics that the students chose were as follows: “The opioid crises in the United States of America”; “The consequences of heroin use in Mombasa, Kenya”; “Stigma against women who use drugs”; and “The death penalty for drug offences” .



Official opening of the Geneva Drug Policy Week

Several important actors from Geneva and from the international system, namely the Ambassador, Head of Host State Division, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and to the Other International Organisations in Geneva; the President of the State Council of the Canton of Geneva; the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights; the Rector of the University of Geneva; the Director of Research at the Global Health Centre, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; and the Chair of the Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances spoke to officially open the Geneva Drug Policy Week.

Key points included the following:

- This is the first time that a Week such as this is organised in Geneva, a week that brings together actors working on substance-related issues in Geneva, whether it be UN agencies, the university, networks of people who use drugs, civil society and people working in the field in Geneva.
- The Geneva ecosystem is favourable to these kind of initiatives of partnerships between International Geneva, actors in the field and the University whose mission is providing collecting information, conducting research and spreading communication, which are very important elements in this field in order to have drug policies based on science and that respect human rights and promote health.
- It is important to continue to create collaborations between universities, the field and the political arena.
- Switzerland's drug policy is based on the 4 pillars strategy (which includes harm reduction), and the Republic and Canton of Geneva and Switzerland are pleased to be supporting the work that the Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances is doing.
- The War on Drugs has failed and human rights-based approaches to drug policy are more essential than ever. Human rights touch so many dimensions of drug policy.
- With regard to governance, studies in other fields have shown that oftentimes when reform happens, it starts out with a small pocket of norm entrepreneurs, norm changers and then suddenly after lots of work and other factors sometimes coming into play, the wave rises and the work of those norm entrepreneurs becomes a cascade; and the Geneva Drug Policy Week is part of moving towards that cascade.



Session on “Conflicts and insecurity relating to drug policy in Africa”

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and the Small Arms Survey.

During this session, different examples of drug markets and associated insecurity, with a particular focus on current examples in Africa were compared, drawing on recent work by the Small Arms Survey on the intersections between drug and arms trafficking in West Africa, and from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime on the heroin trade along the East African coast, particularly in Northern Mozambique. The panel was also accompanied by an exhibition of photo on drug-related gangs in the city of Cape Town in South Africa.

Key points:

- Drug production and trafficking are intimately linked to wider socio-political landscapes and, in many areas, are connected to the governance dynamics of organized crime groups.
- According to the Global Initiative there are six categories of national stances on drug policy reform, as shown in the slideshow: reformers, contesters, retractors, resisters, inertials, and incapables.
- Discusses how in Kenya, proliferation of gangs linked to drug trade has been linked to political violence and vigilantism,
- The Small Arms Survey outlines overlaps between drug trafficking and weapons trafficking in West Africa: overlap between trafficking routes and actors, money laundering, follows established systems of illicit trade, involves armed groups, terrorist networks.



Session on “Drugs, gender and stigma”

United Nations Development Program, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and Dianova International.

This panel discussed the subjects of gender and stigma in addiction. Stigma affects all people who use drugs, but women who use drugs are especially penalized at different levels.

Key points:

- Women face significant barriers in accessing services for people who use drugs. One in three women use drugs
- The need to incorporate a gender perspective in all aspects related to services for people who use drugs, in order to reduce and overcome stigma
- The lack of a gender perspective in drug treatment is the main reason why drug treatment is not working in women, not just because they have more complicated profiles
- Caution must be exercised not to move the stigma from decriminalization of drug use to medicalization of drug use.



Session on “The Duty to Protect Life, Death Penalty for Drug Offences, and Harm Reduction Measures: Reflections on General Comment 36 on the Right to Life of the Human rights Committee”

Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Harm Reduction International, International Network of People Who Use Drugs, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, International Commission of Jurists

This event provided participants of the Geneva Drug Policy Week with the opportunity to engage with human rights experts, to better understand how to use General Comment 36 on the on the right to life (adopted by the Human Rights Committee) to advance the abolition of the death penalty, including for drug offences. It also addressed impunity for extrajudicial and other killings related to the so called “war on drugs”; harm reduction and other relevant measures for the protection of lives of millions of individuals who use drugs, and other related vulnerable populations.

Key points:

- Populist rhetoric fuels a dehumanizing narrative that persons in the drug trade are disposable. General Comment 36 strengthens a necessary counter-narrative that everyone is entitled to a life of dignity.
- Multilateral bodies have the responsibility to respect and protect the right to life. It means not being left to die from preventable diseases, and making sure people who use drugs have access to appropriate services.
- Law enforcement efforts to reduce illicit drug crops has led to widespread violations of the right to life. The militarization of security responses has been a recent trend in Latin America, with the drug control threat narrative driving this trend.



Session on “Contemporary challenges in human rights and drug control”

International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations Office Geneva, Swiss Mission to the United Nations Office Geneva, Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances

In this session, Damon Barrett looked back at developments in human rights and drug policy over the past decades as well as forwards to the many challenges to come. He also presented the International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy. Representatives from the Swiss and Mexican missions to the United Nations Office in Geneva shared their reflections based on the situations in their respective countries.

Key points:

- There are 3 phases of relationship between human rights and drug policy: (1) Absence with no policy articulation and silos; (2) Agenda-setting with the last decade's efforts to break down silos and (3) Standard-setting with the 2019 launch of International Guidelines on Human Rights & Drug Policy.
- Human rights can be seen as a discourse, a social movement, a legal regime, a philosophy and a practice.



Visit of a drug consumption room – Quai 9

Quai 9, Première Ligne

Quai 9 in Geneva, which is managed by the NGO Première Ligne, is one of the first structures to have set up an injection and drug use centre in a major European city. The general aim of this action is the establishment of a place of welcome and a drug use structure designed to reduce the negative somatic, psychological and social consequences of drug use at the individual and collective levels. Participants were able to visit the drug consumption room and were also briefed about Quai 9's history and Première Ligne's activities.

Key points:

- 150 “passages” per day in Quai 9
- Many projects related to drug use : “nuit blanche”, drug testing, medical consultations and counseling including HIV and hepatitis
- Long history of close cooperation with the police, social workers, health structures and the neighborhood.



Visit of a heroin prescription program – CAAP Arve

Geneva University Hospitals

A visit of the Arve Psychiatric Addiction Ambulatory Consultation (CAAP Arve), which takes care of anyone who has an addiction to an opiate such as heroin, morphine or methadone, took place between 10:30 and 12:00 on Wednesday the 27th of June 2019. The visit began with a presentation by the head psychiatrist about how the program works. The roughly 25 people who attended were then divided into 3 groups in order to visit the various parts of the service (treatment rooms, where the heroin is kept, etc).

Key points:

- Detailed presentation of how the program works
- About 70 people in the heroin assisted treatment program.
- Strict criteria for entering into and remaining in the program.
- The team is composed of psychiatrists and nurses.

Session on “Global access, availability and affordability of internationally controlled essential medicines”

International Association for Hospice & Palliative Care, Doctors Without Borders, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), World Health Organization (WHO)

This session focused on the topic of access to controlled substances, from various points of view. One of the panelists discussed governments' obligations to ensure adequate and safe access to internationally controlled essential medicines for the relief of severe pain and palliative care and their difficulties in meeting them; while others reflected on the situation on the ground, from a more operational perspective. The work that the World Health Organization is doing in this field was also touched upon.

Key points:

- More than 75% of the world population no access to internationally controlled essential medicines for the relief of pain and palliative care
- 92% of world's morphine consumed by 17% of world's population (83% consumes just 8%).
- The World Health Organization's Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) reviews substances and makes recommendations to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, with regard to whether or not they should be scheduled, as laid out in the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs.
- In conflict and humanitarian settings a severe lack of access to the controlled substances necessary for palliative care remains.
- Working with the community actors such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent is essential to expand access to controlled substances.



Round Table on “Between security, health and sustainable development objectives: what coherent cannabis policy?”

Federal Commission for addiction-related questions, Addiction Unit of the Geneva University Hospitals, Addictology Service of the Geneva University Hospitals, International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations (INNCO), European Institute for Multidisciplinary Studies on Human Rights and Science and Radio Télévision Suisse romande (RTS)

Key points:

- The Swiss Federal Commission on Questions related to Addiction recommends, once again, to decriminalise and regulate access to products through a system of regulation which provides the necessary space for prevention and protection of young persons.
- The new model must include reflections on the place of the State, private companies, the illegal market, consumers and prevention measures, among others.



Open doors at Quai 9: “Citizenship at the heart of the debate on drug policy”

Quai 9, Première Ligne

Just as it had done in the morning, Quai 9 organised an open doors session which included a visit of the drug consumption room and a citizens’ debate with residents, people who use drugs who go to Quai 9, partners and anyone who was interested in drug use and drug policy issues.

Key points included :

- Première Ligne recalled the negative effects of the War on Drugs ; with the increased violence that it led to; the rise in incarceration of people who use drugs; and the negative impacts on health, human rights and development.
- The discussion with ordinary citizens and residents from the neighbourhood centered on the history of how Quai 9 became part of the neighbourhood, including past and current challenges; There is a necessity to continue the discussions and negotiations with law enforcement officers on a regular basis.
- Visit of Quai 9 and explanation of how Première Ligne works (what activities it includes, how Quai 9 works, how many people come per day; what some of the daily challenges are and how the staff addresses them).



Session on “The 2019 Commission on Narcotic Drugs’ Ministerial Segment: what does it mean for civil society advocacy”

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC), Global Commission on Drug Policy, Harm Reduction International, International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD)

This session analysed the key wins and challenges of the Ministerial Segment and its Declaration, and discussed the implications of this and other key UN high-level documents on drug policy for civil society advocacy towards Geneva-based UN entities/processes, in particular the World Health Organization, the U.N. Human Rights Council and Universal Periodic Review.

The key points included the following:

- The commitments and targets set in the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action have not been achieved: 450'000 drug-related deaths in 2015, +125% of illicit cultivation during the last ten years and the illicit demand has continuously increased.
- The international human rights system must be used to bring justice to people who use drugs and their communities.
- People who use drugs’ participation in global drug policy meeting was challenged by States but “nothing about us without us” remains people who use drugs’ core principle, meaning a policy must not be something done to them.



Session on “Health-related issues of people who use drugs”

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Health Organization (WHO), International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD), Dristi Nepal

The session created space for a dialogue between international organisations and civil society on effective global and country strategies aimed at improving the health of people who use drugs. Panelists shared their perspectives on how the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) could help bring harm reduction and structural interventions into national health packages and broaden the focus of harm reduction beyond HIV.

Key points:

- In 2017, 272 million people used drugs and 585 000 deaths were attributable to drug use in 2017: directly related (opioid overdose) and indirectly related (HIV, HBV, HCV).
- The number of countries with plans for hepatitis is increasing. However, there are significant variations in country responses to the needs of people who use drugs and people in prisons.
- No strategies and policies should be done without including the communities (people who use drugs).



Screening of the film “Laila at the bridge” followed by a discussion

Global Commission on Drug Policy and Intuitive Pictures

Key points:

- The film “Laila At The Bridge” delves into the unorthodox drug addiction treatment methods of Afghani advocate Laila Haidari
- The discussion after the screening focused on why the film was so important to make and to share around the world. It reveals the specific challenges that Afghanistan encounters with regard to how to address the dramatic heroin use on its territories and the difficulties in trying to change the *status quo*.



Panel on UN System Common Position followed by a reception hosted by the Global Commission on Drug Policy

United Nations Development Program, The Global Commission on Drug Policy, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, World Health Organization (WHO)

This panel discussion focused on the Geneva-based mandates and the “United Nations System Common Position supporting the implementation of the international drug control policy through effective inter-agency collaboration” of the UN Chief Executive Board (CEB), chaired by the UN Secretary General and representing 31 UN agencies.

Key points:

- It is urgent to try to implement the Common Position at the country level and make sure we are safeguarding the space for civil society and use our collective voice for one of the most vulnerable populations in the world.
- Civil society and other sectors need to hold the UN accountable with this document. It is civil society’s document as well.
- The Common Position is an amazing step and confirms the need to focus on various health issues such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC), access to medicine and harm reduction, not just decriminalisation. It should help us to further its implementation.
- Drug policy happens locally, not globally. Decriminalisation will be one of the key social enablers for promoting health, rights and drug policy.
- The key challenge is how everything in the Common Position can trickle down to the country level.



Closing Reception of the Geneva Drug Policy Week

Global Commission on Drug Policy

At the Closing Reception of the Geneva Drug Policy Week, hosted by the Global Commission on Drug Policy, the high-level speakers (Ruth Dreifuss, Chair of the Global Commission on Drug Policy and former Swiss Federal Councillor; Mauro Poggia, Minister, Council of the State of Geneva; Philippe Burrin, Director of the Graduate Institute Geneva) congratulated the organisers of the Week for this initiative.

They stressing how important it is to bring all of the different actors that were represented during the Week together; how Geneva is an ideal place to do this; that the War on Drugs and purely repressive drug policies are a thing of the past; and encouraging all of the actors who contributed to the Week to continue their important work in this field.



Session on “Non-problematic consumption and drug use: exchanges with users and practitioners”

Argos

Key points:

- Argos' program “Toulourenc” and the specific concept of non-problematic consumption were presented. The particularity of Toulourenc is to accompany people who use drugs in the acquisition of competences to reach a non-problematic consumption of drugs or continue not using at all.
- Two people who use drugs shared their experiences with this program including what they are getting out of it and how it is helping them to reintegrate into society.



A documentary and discussion. “Community in action: People who use drugs and other key populations fighting AIDS epidemic in Russia”

Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Candle Charitable Foundation, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, AIDS Foundation East West International, the Coordination Committee of the Program to Expand Access of Vulnerable Groups of the Population to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment, and Care Services in the Russian Federation, and partners

The event consisted of a screening of the film *Nonexistent? We exist!*, which documents the sincere efforts of mutual support and respect for marginalized groups, centered on the idea that modern health care should promote the dignity of each individual. The film was followed by a panel discussion on the place of key populations in the HIV response in Russia and how to move forward to solve the HIV crisis in Russia and beyond.

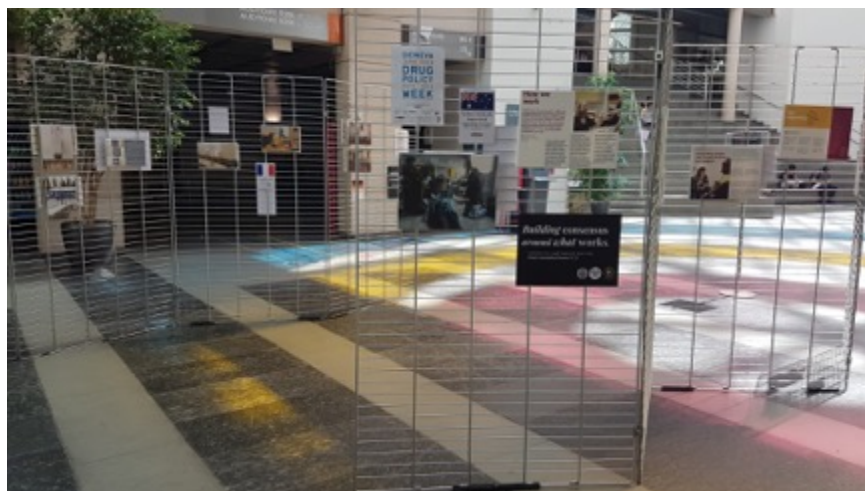
Key points:

- The film *Nonexistent? We exist!* showed the work of different activists and field workers in Russia and the challenges they are facing within this context.
- The panel and the audience discussed the difficulties of working in the Russian context, the importance of including the communities (both people who use drugs and field workers) and the need to raise more awareness of human rights violations taking place on a daily basis in the Russian Federation.



Exhibition “safe consumption around the world”

The exhibition presents photographs of supervised drug consumption programs around the world and a series of indicators showing the positive health and social outcomes of these programs. It was installed at UniMail for the duration of the Week.



For further information about the Geneva Drug Policy Week, contact the Geneva Platform on Human Rights, Health and Psychoactive Substances at genevapatform@grea.ch or <http://www.genevapatform.ch>